

TEENS

of the Plains



Were pioneer teenagers anything like me?

By Charlotte Larcabal
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When we think of pioneers, we often think about bravery and sacrifice, handcarts and oxen, and lots and lots of walking.

Do you ever think about the teenagers who crossed the plains? Sure they didn't have Facebook or cellphones, but those teenage pioneers weren't so different from you. They loved laughing and having a good time, they had crushes and heartbreaks, they made mistakes, got into embarrassing scrapes, felt alone in the world, and stood strong in their testimonies. Just like you.

FALLING IN (and out of) (and in) (and back out of) LOVE

"The night before we left, . . . Henry Ridgeley, came to bid me farewell," wrote Margaret. "Under our trysting tree we each vowed eternal constancy—for four years, at least."

Eternal constancy gets hard when there are several nice young men in your company. Soon Margaret, who was 17, was eying another boy.

"He used to say such lovely things to me—told me that I was beautiful and intelligent, and even went so far as to say that I was amiable, something I had never been accused of before.

He told me that I was the only woman he ever loved and that we were just suited to each other. I began to believe him, and when he proposed, what could I say but 'yes.' Well, the course of true love did run smooth, at least until we got into the Valley. Then we had the usual lovers' quarrel but not the usual making up. In a short time he let me know that another girl appreciated him, if I did not."¹





*Margaret
Judd Clawson*
(pictured at age 18)



George Staples
(pictured as an adult)

BECOMING AN HONORARY SIOUX (*What, that never happened to you?*)

George Staples left his home and family in England to travel to Utah. When he was 16, he joined a company of Saints in the United States, but as they crossed the plains, George was separated from the group. The company had to keep moving or risk running into warring Sioux Indians. As the story goes, he stayed behind. George later joined a Sioux tribe and lived as an honorary Sioux for years.

People in the Salt Lake Valley heard about a white boy living as a Sioux. Eventually, a group came looking for him. As the group neared the tribe, George recognized someone. With a wild whoop, he ran to his father. They were thrilled to see each other, but George's Sioux mother was devastated to lose her adopted son. So, before leaving with his father, George promised to return and visit his Sioux family. He kept his promise.²



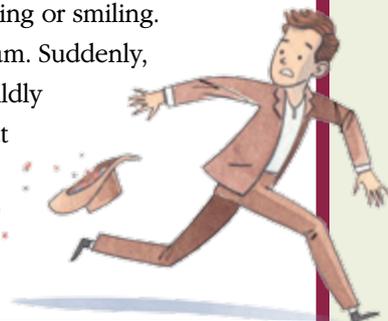
COMPLETELY LOSING YOUR COOL



Brigham Henry Roberts
(pictured at age 27)

Have you ever missed your bus? When Brigham Henry Roberts was nine, he and his friend missed their wagon train! They spent a little too much time picking berries, and the company took off without them. The boys made a mad dash for the disappearing wagon train, but stopped short when they saw three Native Americans on horses directly in their path. As the terrified boys inched forward, the three men just watched them without moving or smiling.

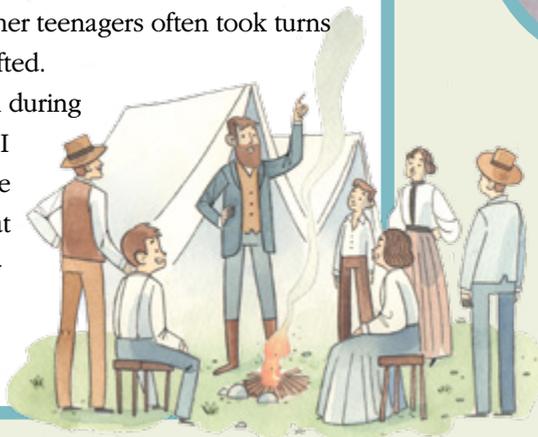
The pressure must have been a little much for Brigham. Suddenly, with a wild yell, he flung his berry-filled cap and ran wildly past them. “They say [Native Americans] never laugh, but I learned differently,” he later said. “As the race for the train continued, I saw they were bending double over their horses with their screams of laughter.”³



BEARING AND STRENGTHENING YOUR TESTIMONY

Susan Noble Grant left for Zion when she was 15 years old. She loved sitting around the campfire and listening to the adults talk about their experiences with the Prophet Joseph Smith. She and the other teenagers often took turns bearing their own testimonies to keep spirits lifted.

“You do not know how happy we were, even during these severe days of hardest trials. As young as I was, I knew the gospel had been restored. More than once I had heard Joseph Smith declare that our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus, the resurrected Savior, had come and talked with him. To this day this testimony has never left me.”⁴



Susan Noble Grant

PIONEERS OF TODAY

Sure they pushed handcarts and hauled water and would probably flip out if they saw a smartphone, but were the teens of the plains really so different from youth today?

No! And as today’s pioneers, “we need to believe as they believed,” said President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “We need to work as they worked. We need to serve as they served. And we need to overcome as they overcame.”⁵ **NE**

NOTES

1. Margaret Clawson, “Reminiscences of Margaret Clawson,” *Relief Society Magazine*, June 1919, 324–25.
2. Maurine Jensen Proctor, *The Gathering: Mormon Pioneers on the Trail to Zion* (1996).
3. B. H. Roberts, *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts*, ed. Gary James Bergera (1990), 26–27.
4. Carter E. Grant, “Robbed by Wolves, a True Story,” *Relief Society Magazine*, July 1928, 357–58.
5. M. Russell Ballard, Oct. 2008 general conference.